

The Status Report

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MCSW Holds Metrowest Public Hearing



*Mass Bay Community College
President Dr. Carole Berotte Joseph
presents testimony on February 25th.*

On February 25th the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women conducted a public hearing at Framingham State College to collect information regarding key issues impacting the lives of women in the Metrowest region.

Testimony covered a broad range of issues including the impact of the economic crisis on women, healthcare, insurance coverage, health disparities, domestic violence, teen pregnancy, reductions in public aid and program funding, incarcerated women and women's prisons, access to higher education, and immigration. The economic crisis and its immense effect on women was a primary concern for most of the individuals testifying.

Dr. Lily Hsu of the Metrowest Community Healthcare Foundation reported that the rates of breast cancer and teen pregnancy in the Metrowest region are above the state average and asked the Commission to partner with the Foundation to advocate for more services and resources to address these issues.

Megan Christopher of Metrowest Legal Services provided information regarding the occurrence rate of domestic violence in low income homes and reported an expected increase as financial troubles continue. She recommended the Commission work on developing a study of gender equity in the courts.

Senator Karen Spilka, representing Second Middlesex and Norfolk District, presented testimony regarding the consolidation of homeless and housing services of the Department of Transitional Assistance and the Department of Housing and Community Development. The Senator presented information on the effect it will have on a person's ability to obtain shelter if that individual has sold their home within the last three years.

Representative Tom Sannicandro of Seventh Middlesex presented testimony regarding the status of the MCI-Framingham women's prison and current policies concerning civil commitments. Rep. Sannicandro encouraged the Commission to examine matters relating to women inmates with mental illness.

The MCSW's next Public Hearing will be held in Northern Middlesex County in the Spring. The MCSW is seeking organizations in this region to assist with coordinating, hosting and spreading the word. Interested parties may contact Outreach Coordinator Jill Ashton at jill.ashton@state.ma.us or 617-626-6525.



*Senator Karen Spilka presents
testimony regarding Article 87.*

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Executive Director Corner

After a legislative call at the State House earlier this month, I noticed a statue of a woman with a small girl just outside in the courtyard. Hard to miss portrait after portrait of the Commonwealth's founding fathers but immortalized women are rare in the State House. Being new to New England (meaning no one in my family sailed on the Mayflower), I didn't recognize Anne Hutchinson so I Googled her when I got back to the office and then read Eve LaPlante's recent biography, "American Jezebel".

For a pioneer settler of Massachusetts, turns out that Anne Hutchinson is quite an appropriate modern symbol. Hutchinson's "crime" was speaking her mind freely, something we might call "community organizing" and espousing way ahead of her times ideas about equal leadership roles for women in society. Put this into the context of the prevailing Puritan culture of the 1600's and you might see a very radical woman, one who stood out for both her beliefs and her methods of communicating. If Anne's statue could open her eyes and look out on today's Boston Common, would she leap off her pedestal and become a pant suit wearing politician or grass roots community organizer? Would she run to one of the closest universities and delve into the philosophical questions and debate she was so well known for championing, and ultimately persecuted for? As a mother of 15 children, would she turn around and walk back into the State House to lead the Paid Sick Day coalition in the fight for workers seeking time off to care for sick family members? (If Anne's statue could animate, it's more likely she would walk to the closest church.) Regardless of her course of action, Anne would most likely continue having conversations with those she agreed with and disagreed with, communicating her political and spiritual beliefs, convening open conversations and bringing to the table diverse groups not usually found working together. Sound familiar? It should—these are the same qualities in a leader we look for today and reflect the same priorities and values of the MCSW.

February and March were opportunities for the MCSW to convene and participate in conversations that would make Anne Hutchinson proud. As you will read here, our Public Hearing in Framingham drew a large and diverse crowd who testified on a range of matters from child care concerns, problems experienced by low income women, students and higher than average rates of breast cancer in Metro-west neighborhoods. The International Women's Day event hosted at Simmons College taught all of us lessons about international and local food and water ownership that impact our health, lives and families on a daily basis. MCSW attended an international gathering at the United Nations to follow up on work began in Beijing and were reminded that these conversations go on throughout the world. As Anne Hutchinson role modeled for us, convening inclusive conversation is an effective change agency tool.



Kira Dunn, Executive Director



Anne Hutchinson statue at the Massachusetts State House.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kira Dunn". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kira" and last name "Dunn" clearly distinguishable.

Kira Dunn, Executive Director

p.s. Anne was found guilty of blasphemy and "infecting women" in both civil and religious trials. Her punishment was banishment. In 1987, then Governor Michael Dukakis granted Anne a pardon.

MCSW Attends United Nations' International Women's Congress

Commissioner Ruth Nemzoff and Executive Director Kira Dunn attended the first few days of the opening of the 53rd Congress of the Commission on the Status of Women convened at the United Nations. Not surprisingly the content of many of the sessions focused on priorities shared by the MCSW: increasing wage equality, access to quality and comprehensive healthcare, women's leadership roles and the reduction of violence against women. We learned of public and private initiatives ranging from the "10,000 Entrepreneurs Program" to give one cow, one goat and two chickens and business education to underserved women, to programs to educate women in Kazakhstan to read their town's budgets so that they can ensure that money allocated to programs such as daycare are put in the budget. The White Ribbon Campaign which engages men in the fight against domestic violence already has a presence in Massachusetts and is taking off worldwide. While the MCSW was not able to fund the trip, it was a key international gathering that connected the agency with its Beijing beginnings and provided an opportunity for education on priority issues.



Commissioner Nemzoff and Executive Director Dunn at the United Nations in New York City.

All over the world women recognize the need to collaborate and coordinate efforts. Collecting data about women and reporting their voices and experiences in the media are seen as essential strategies for improving women's lives and for sharing best practices. Everyone in attendance agreed that there is no magic solution, but that a collective mobilization is needed to improve women's lives. At this convention, the group will ratify a collective set of principles and launch the next International Conference.

Most importantly we returned invigorated and recommitted to human rights, women's rights and eager to continue our work. One step each of you can take is to read the Convention to Eliminate All forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) <http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/cedaw.htm>. It is clear that women must know their rights in order to work for them!

International Women's Day Celebrated at Simmons College

The MCSW co-sponsored the 12th Annual Boston-area International Women's Day Breakfast at Simmons College with a gathering of over 100 women for a fascinating look at "Who Owns Your Food & Water Globally & Locally?". This theme, keeping consistent with IWD environmental themes of 2009, examined the policy and practical impact of how water and food ownership affect the lives of women and their communities.

Did you know that there are 1.1 billion women who don't have access to safe and clean water? Did you know that, on average, women and girls spend 2 - 4 hours every day simply gathering water? Did you know that locally, women living in poor neighborhoods with decaying lead pipes can result in their homes being condemned and ultimately their children being removed from the home? Simply put, access to water is a basic human right and as women are disproportionately impacted, is a matter for activists everywhere.

Panelist Patricia Jones, Environmental Justice manager at the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee reminded attendees that as regular consumers of food and water, we are all part of an agricultural society. "We all eat, we all drink and therefore we all have a responsibility to care for the agricultural well being of our society."

Local farmer Lynda Simkins from Natick said that 85% of produce found in your local grocery store comes from another region of the country and urged everyone to consider the environmental savings of buying locally grown food. A head of lettuce trucked in from Texas has to travel hundreds of miles, is therefore less fresh and accounts for gallons of burned fuel. The same head of lettuce grown on her organic farm and purchased at a local farmers market reduces green house gas emissions, supports a local business and is always fresher.

The event challenged attendees to each commit to one action step themselves towards food and water ownership: look at your next water bill, join a cooperative farm, buy your produce at the local farmers market, check the labels on your food and identify locally grown products. Regardless of which step you can take, every action counts!

Pathways to Pay Equity

Many women find themselves working in low-paying positions. Employment and pay inequalities effect women in many areas including access to education, healthcare and the ability to support themselves and their families. Education is at the heart of economic opportunity and has the power to reduce poverty and improve a woman's health. For some, getting an education is a matter of life or death. Consider the following facts released by the girleffect.org:

- 70% of the 130 million out of school youth are girls
- Half of these girls will be mother before their 18th birthday
- Pregnancy is the leading cause of death for 15-19 year olds worldwide.

Investment in education and career development directly improves the quality of life for a woman. In response, the MCSW encourages women to consider obtaining education and training in science, technology, engineering and math (STEM). The Commonwealth Covenant Fund was designed to enhance the ability of students to pursue higher education in STEM fields. The Covenant Fund is a program that provides loan forgiveness for undergraduate tuition to Massachusetts' students who have attended public universities or colleges in Massachusetts and remain in state to pursue careers in these fields. The Fund was established in July 2007 by legislation sponsored by State Senator Robert O'Leary.

Eileen Glovsky, Executive Director of the Commonwealth Covenant Fund, strongly encourages all students, especially young women, currently studying in one of the STEM fields to begin the application process by registering with the Fund. Students are eligible for the program after they have pre-qualified and completed a year of employment in Massachusetts in a STEM field.

Glovsky hopes this fund will help prevent young female students from thinking narrowly about STEM fields and encourage them to pursue science and technology careers. Women make up 42% of the pre-qualified Fund applicants, suggesting that perhaps women in Massachusetts are pursuing education and STEM careers nearly as much as men. However, these numbers only reflect those that have applied for loan forgiveness from the Fund and not the whole of students obtaining degrees in the STEM fields.

For additional information including the specific eligibility requirements for applicants please visit the Treasurer's link on

Commission Corner: Checking in with Commissions Across the Commonwealth

Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women

Commissioners of the Bristol County Commission on the Status of Women will be appointed in early March and an inaugural event celebrating the BCCSW will be held on the University of Massachusetts - Dartmouth campus at the end of the month. Details regarding the event will be announced in the coming weeks.

Cape Cod & Islands Commission on the Status of Women

The MCSW continues to accept applications for the newly established Cape Cod & Islands Commission on the Status of Women (CCICSW). The CCICSW was enacted by law and established this month to advance Cape Code women toward full equality and to promote rights and opportunities for all women. The CCICSW will be comprised of 13 women who have had prior experience working towards the improvement of the status of women. Commissioners will be drawn from diverse racial, ethnic, religious, age, sexual orientation, and socio-economic backgrounds from throughout Cape Cod & the Islands.

The Commission's duties include: studying, reviewing and reporting on the status of women on Cape Cod & the Islands; promoting and facilitating collaboration among local women's organizations; recommending policies that benefit women to agencies, officers of the state, and local government; and holding fact-finding hearings and other public forums as it may deem necessary. The Commission will meet at least 6 times a year, at the members' discretion.

Applications are available online at www.mass.gov/women, by emailing a request to mcsw@state.ma.us or calling 617-626-6520. **To be considered for appointment, please submit a completed application to the Massachusetts Commission on the Status of Women, Attn: Cape Cod Commission Applications, 19 Staniford St., 6th Floor Boston, MA 02114 or by email to mcsw@state.ma.us.** Please remember that information you provide is public and cannot be kept private or confidential. Applications will be accepted until **March 30th**.

Take Action. Get Educated. Get Involved.

If you are interested in becoming more involved in organizations focusing on women's issues across the Commonwealth you can start by attending any one of the number of events and meetings taking place in the coming weeks.

Tuesday, March 10 (3:30 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.): 4th Annual National Women & Girls HIV/AIDS Awareness Day

Location: Roxbury Center for the Arts at Hibernian Hall (184 Dudley Street, Roxbury)

Details: Tuesday, March 10th marks the annual National Woman & Girls Day HIV/AIDS Awareness Day. This year, the Women of Color RoundTable invites you to enjoy a relaxing dinner with live jazz and meaningful conversations through a facilitated dialogue between community women and Black HIV/AIDS physicians. This discussion will include exploring relationships and how they put women at risk. Please RSVP your attendance to <http://fs3.formsite.com/divoaid/FourthAnnualNWGHAAD/index.html>.

Friday, March 20 (7:30 a.m. - 3:30 p.m.): Massachusetts Health Council Women's Health Forum - *Getting Healthy, Staying Healthy: Knowledge is Everything*

Location: Marriott Copley Place (110 Huntington Avenue, Boston)

Details: This educational conference is designed to improve the health of the attendees, their friends, families and associates and give women a starting point in leading healthier, happier, more productive lives. Women from all walks of life should attend to gain an insight on taking better care of themselves; from reducing stress in one's everyday life to preventing some of the most common and serious illnesses that effect women. Tickets are \$85 for MCH members and \$95 for non-members. Please visit www.mahealthcouncil.org for more information.

March 27-29: Women, Action & The Media - A Conference for Activists, Journalists & Everyone

Location: MIT's Stata Center (77 Massachusetts Avenue, Cambridge)

Details: This year's Conference theme is Inside/Outside. We all belong inside some communities or networks and are new to or feel excluded or alienated from others. The tension that exists between insiders and outsiders at any given movement, identity, industry or ideology can be destructive, but it can also be harnessed toward mutually beneficial change. At WAMI2009, you'll explore both sides of this inescapable dynamic in our relationships, organizations, societies and movements. Registration for the event is \$145. Scholarships and volunteer opportunities are available. Please call 617.876.5310 or visit www.womenactionmedia.org for more information.

March 27-29: Female Faces of War Conference

Location: Battleship Cove (5 Water Street, Fall River)

Details: A Friday night screening of *Lioness* with an exclusive introduction and discussion with filmmaker Daria Sommers will be followed by an overnight aboard the ship. Saturday's conference will consist of multiple speakers, including a keynote address by Brigadier General Wilma Vaught (Ret.), president of the Women in Military Service for America (WIMSA) Memorial in Washington, DC. Price for the full two-day program and overnight is \$80; price of the Friday evening movie only \$10; Friday evening movie, dinner, and reception \$45; and the Saturday program is only \$35. The Conference is presented by The YWCAs of Greater Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts along with Women Protecting US exhibit at the USS *Massachusetts*. To register, contact Paula Hague 508-678-1100, Ext. 101.

Sunday, April 5 (10:00 a.m.): Boston Area Rape Crisis Center Fourth Annual Walk for Change

Location: Canal Park at CambridgeSide Galleria (Cambridge)

Details: This event is held to both kick off Sexual Assault Awareness Month and to raise much needed funds for the free services that BARCC offers to sexual assault victims, families and the community. Registration begins at 10:00 a.m. and the Walk begins at 11 a.m. The route is a 5k loop around the Charles River. The BARCC's goal this year is 1,000 walkers and \$100,000 raised! Walkers can register online at www.firstgiving.com/barcc or they can visit www.barcc.org for paper registration materials. Registration is \$20 to pre-register and \$30 day-of.

Tuesday, April 14 (6:00 p.m. - 8:30 p.m.): Women Who Launch - Discussion on Mentoring and Networking Event

Location: Inner Space Yoga Studio (17 Station Street, Brookline Village)

Details: The Brookline Commission for Women, in collaboration with the Brookline Chamber of Commerce and the Brookline Economic Development, is hosting the 3rd *Women Who Launch - Discussion on Mentoring and Networking Event*. *Women Who Launch* is a series of programming aimed at current and future female entrepreneurs. This event is a great opportunity for current and prospective female entrepreneurs to network and enjoy delicious refreshments from Kookoo Cafe and learn about the importance and benefits of mentoring for women! For more information please e-mail BCW@town.brookline.ma.us.

For even more upcoming events please visit our online calendar at www.mass.gov/women/calendar/upcoming.htm.

Do you have an event you would like to see on this list in an upcoming issue of The Status Report? E-mail the details to Program Coordinator Kim Sebastiao at Kimberly.Sebastiao@state.ma.us and we will do our best to include your event in

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**Do you have questions or comments about this
newsletter? If so, please contact**

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Member of the

